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Economic and environmental questions: sustainable development

Report of the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests

Programme budget implications of the draft resolution submitted by the President of the Council on the basis of informal consultations held on his behalf by Mr. Bagher Asadi (Islamic Republic of Iran) E/2000/L.32

Statement submitted by the Secretary-General in accordance with rule 31 of the rules of procedure of the Economic and Social Council

Executive summary

1. By draft resolution E/2000/L.32, the Economic and Social Council would, inter alia, do the following:

(a) Decide to establish an intergovernmental body called the United Nations Forum on Forests as one of its subsidiary bodies;

(b) Decide that the Forum would hold an organizational session as soon as possible and a substantive session in 2001;

(c) Request the Secretary-General to establish a compact secretariat to assist the Forum to carry out its functions related to the international arrangements on forests.

2. In order to implement the provisions of the draft resolution, the Secretary-General considers that the current staff resources of the Secretariat would eventually need to be strengthened and that the necessary staffing resources of the compact secretariat to be funded by the United Nations might comprise four staff members at the Professional level and two staff members at the General Service level. It is assumed that this compact secretariat would continue to be strengthened through

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secondments from international and regional organizations and voluntary contributions.

3. The Secretary-General considers that the resources contributed for activities related to forests are sufficient to enable the current staff of the secretariat on forests to carry out the activities related to the preparation and holding of the organizational and first substantive session of the Forum in 2001.

4. Should resources be insufficient between now and the first session of the Forum, the Secretary-General would submit revised estimates with a request for additional resources through a charge against the contingency fund. In the course of the first substantive session of the Forum, the Secretary-General would be in a better position to assess the actual requirements of the compact secretariat and he intends to submit his proposals for permanent funding through a statement of programme budget implications reflecting the decisions that the Forum would have taken regarding its long-term work programme.

A. Requests contained in the draft decision

1. Under the terms of the paragraphs of draft resolution E/2000/L.32 listed below, the Economic and Social Council would decide or recommend the following:

(a) Paragraph 3: "*Further decides*, in order to achieve the objective and to carry out the functions outlined above:

(i) To establish an intergovernmental body called the United Nations Forum on Forests;

(ii) To invite the executive heads of relevant organizations of the United Nations system and heads of other relevant international and regional organizations, institutions and instruments to form a collaborative partnership on forests to support the work of the United Nations Forum and to enhance cooperation and coordination among participants, and to call upon their governing bodies and the heads thereof to support the activities of the collaborative partnership on forests so as to achieve the goals of the United Nations Forum;

(iii) That the United Nations Forum shall, inter alia:

a. Within five years (on the basis of the assessment of the progress made at the national, regional and global levels referred to in paragraph 2 (e) of the draft resolution) consider the parameters of a mandate for developing a legal framework on all types of forests, with a view to recommending them to the Economic and Social Council and through the Council to the General Assembly, it being understood that this process could develop the financial provisions to implement any future agreed legal framework, and also consider recommendations made by expert groups referred to in paragraph 4 (k) of the draft resolution, on the establishment of mechanisms on finance, technology transfer and trade;

b. Take steps to devise approaches towards appropriate financial and technology transfer support to enable the implementation of sustainable forest management, as recommended under the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and Intergovernmental Forum on Forests processes";

(b) Paragraph 4: "*Decides* that the United Nations Forum on Forests should be established as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council composed of all States Members of the United Nations and members of the specialized agencies with full and equal participation, including voting rights, and having the following working modalities:

(i) The United Nations Forum should be open to all States and operate in a transparent and participatory manner, and should also involve relevant international and regional organizations, including regional economic integration organizations, institutions and instruments, as well as major groups, as identified in Agenda 21;

(ii) The United Nations Forum shall operate under the rules of procedures of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council provided that this is not in contradiction with the provisions of the present paragraph;

(iii) The supplementary arrangements established by the Economic and Social Council for the Commission on Sustainable Development in Council decisions 1993/215 of 12 February 1993 and 1995/201 of 8 February 1995 shall also apply to the United Nations Forum; and, within the rules of procedure, the work of the United Nations Forum should build upon the transparent and participatory practices established by the Commission, the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests;

(iv) The Bureau of the United Nations Forum shall consist of one Chairperson and four Vice-Chairpersons, one of whom should also act as the Rapporteur, in accordance with the principle of equitable geographical distribution;

(v) The United Nations Forum shall report to the Economic and Social Council and through the Council to the General Assembly;

(vi) The United Nations Forum shall seek ways and means of strengthening synergies and coordination in policy development and implementation of forest-related activities, inter alia, through making the reports of its sessions available to relevant United Nations bodies and

other international forest-related organizations, instruments and intergovernmental processes;

(vii) The United Nations Forum should work on the basis of a multi-year programme of work, drawing on the elements reflected in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Forest Principles, chapter 11 of Agenda 21 and the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals for action;

(viii) The United Nations Forum should maintain close links with the Commission on Sustainable Development, including, inter alia, through the convening of joint bureau meetings, taking particular account of the importance of ensuring the coherence of its activities with the broader sustainable development agenda carried out by the Commission;

(ix) The United Nations Forum may hold its sessions at venues other than the United Nations Headquarters in accordance with established United Nations rules and practices;

(x) The United Nations Forum should initially meet annually, for a period of up to two weeks, subject to the review referred to below, with a high-level ministerial segment to be held for two to three days, as required, which segment could include a one-day policy dialogue with the heads of organizations participating in the collaborative partnership on forests, as well as other forest-related international and regional organizations, institutions and instruments; and should ensure the opportunity to receive and consider inputs from representatives of major groups as identified in Agenda 21, in particular through the organization of multi-stakeholder dialogues;

(xi) The United Nations Forum may recommend, as appropriate, the convening of ad hoc expert groups of limited duration, involving experts from developed and developing countries, for scientific and technical advice, as well as for consideration of mechanisms and strategies to finance and transfer environmentally sound technologies; and may encourage country-sponsored initiatives, such as international expert meetings";

(c) Paragraph 5: "*Recommends* that the General Assembly, taking into account its resolution 1798 (XVII) of 11 December 1962, make the necessary provisions so that the travel expenses for one representative of each member State participating in a session of the United Nations Forum that is also a member State of the Commission on Sustainable Development, are paid from the regular budget of the United Nations";

(d) Paragraph 6: "*Invites* voluntary extrabudgetary contributions in support of participation of representatives of developing countries that are not members of the Commission on Sustainable Development, in sessions of the United Nations Forum and its subsidiary bodies";

(e) Paragraph 7: "*Decides* that the United Nations Forum shall:

(i) Hold a short organizational meeting, as soon as possible, with the purpose of electing its officers, determining the duration of their term of office and considering all proposals and options concerning the location of the secretariat, in conjunction with four days of informal consultations regarding the draft multi-year programme of work;

(ii) Hold its first substantive session in 2001 with its provisional agenda comprising the following items:

a. Adoption of the multi-year programme of work;

b. Development of a plan of action for the implementation of Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals for action, which shall address financial provisions;

c. Initiation of the United Nations Forum's work with the collaborative partnership on forests;

d. Provisional agenda, date and venue for its second substantive session in 2002;

e. Proposal of venues of future United Nations Forum sessions";

(f) Paragraph 8: "*Recommends* that the collaborative partnership on forests should build on a high-level, informal group, such as the Inter-Agency

Task Force on Forests,[1] which would receive guidance from the United Nations Forum; facilitate and promote coordinated and cooperative action, including joint programming and submissions of coordinated proposals to the concerned governing bodies; and facilitate donor coordination; and that such a partnership would submit coordinated inputs and progress reports to the United Nations Forum, operate in an open, transparent and flexible manner, and undertake periodic reviews of its effectiveness";

(g) Paragraph 10: "*Requests* the Secretary-General to establish a compact secretariat comprising highly qualified staff, constituted in accordance with established rules and procedures of the United Nations and strengthened through staff from secretariats of international and regional organizations, institutions and instruments, which secretariat to support the work described above, should service the United Nations Forum, support the collaborative partnership on forests and also coordinate its activities with the secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development;

(h) Paragraph 11: "*Decides*, bearing in mind what is stated in paragraph 10 above and unless otherwise decided intergovernmentally, that the secretariat shall be located preferably at United Nations Headquarters in New York, with the understanding that a recommendation for a final decision on this matter should be made at the first organizational meeting of the United Nations Forum, in early 2001, taking into consideration all proposals thereon;

(i) Paragraph 12: "*Encourages* the executive heads of relevant organizations of the United Nations system and heads of other relevant international and regional organizations, institutions and instruments to support the United Nations Forum secretariat, inter alia, through seconding of staff, such as was effected during the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/ Intergovernmental Forum on Forests process";

(j) Paragraph 13: "*Recommends* that the funding for the functioning of the United Nations Forum and its secretariat should be provided from the regular budget of the United Nations, within existing resources, resources of organizations participating in the partnership and extrabudgetary resources provided by interested donors, with specific modalities to be determined by relevant bodies of the United Nations and the governing bodies of the other organizations concerned";

(k) Paragraph 14: "*Also recommends* that the General Assembly decide on the funding for the functioning of the United Nations Forum and its secretariat in accordance with the budget procedures established by the Assembly in its resolution 41/213 of 19 December 1986";

(l) Paragraph 15: "*Requests* the Secretary-General in proposing future United Nations programme budgets to include provisions for the United Nations Forum and its secretariat";

(m) Paragraph 16: "*Calls upon* interested donor Governments, financial institutions and other organizations to make voluntary financial contributions to a trust fund to be established in order to facilitate, in particular, an early start of the work of the United Nations Forum and its secretariat";

(n) Paragraph 17: "*Decides* that the international arrangement on forests should be dynamic and should adapt to evolving conditions and that the effectiveness of this arrangement shall be reviewed in five years, and also decides that the five year review of this arrangement shall address the United Nations Forum's institutional framework as well, including its position within the United Nation system".

B. Relationship of the proposals to the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 and to the programme of work for the biennium 2000-2001

2. The proposals enumerated above and the related outputs relate to subprogramme 28.4, Sustainable development, of programme 28, Economic and social affairs, of the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001[2] and to paragraph 9.105 of subprogramme 28.4, Sustainable development, of section 9, Economic and Social Affairs of the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.[3] The proposed working modalities of the new United Nations Forum on Forests are expected to be similar in nature to the current working modalities of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, which are described under subprogramme 28.4 of section 9 of the 2000-2001 programme budget. Consequently, no additional outputs are anticipated for servicing the United Nations Forum on Forests in 2001. The modifications to the outputs under paragraph 9.105 of the programme budget for 2000-2001 would consist of the deletion of references to the Intergovernmental

Forum on Forests and the insertion of references to the United Nations Forum on Forests.

C. Additional requirements

1. Section 9, Economic and social affairs

Travel of representatives to meetings and the session of the United Nations Forum on Forests in 2001

3. Provision has been made under section 9 of the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 to cover the travel requirements of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests, a subsidiary body of the Commission on Sustainable Development, for two annual sessions lasting up to two weeks each. Should it be decided to establish the United Nations Forum on Forests and that it would initially meet for a period of up to two weeks annually, it is envisaged that its first substantive session in 2001 (proposed to be held from 25 June to 6 July 2001 in New York) could be implemented within the provisions approved for the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests. Assuming further that the short organizational meeting of the Forum would be held in New York and would be attended by representatives of Permanent Missions to the United Nations in that city, it is estimated that any additional requirements for the meeting could be met from existing resources.

4. In line with the provisions of paragraph 6 of the draft resolution, the cost of travel to the sessions of the United Nations Forum on Forests by representatives of developing countries that are not members of the Commission on Sustainable Development, will be met by extrabudgetary resources if available. It should be noted that this procedure would imply an exception to the provisions of General Assembly resolution 1798 (XVII) of 11 December 1962 on travel and subsistence allowances to members of organs and subsidiary organs of the United Nations.

Compact secretariat

5. In paragraph 13 of the draft resolution, the Council would recommend "that the funding for the functioning of the United Nations Forum and its secretariat should be provided from the regular budget of the United Nations, within existing resources ...". The attention of the Council is drawn to the provisions of General Assembly resolution 45/248 B, section VI, which are as follows:

> "[*The General Assembly* ...]
>
> 1. *Reaffirms* that the Fifth Committee is the appropriate Main Committee of the General Assembly entrusted with responsibilities for administrative and budgetary matters;
>
> 2. *Reaffirms also* the role of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions;
>
> 3. *Expresses its concern* at the tendency of its substantive Committees and other intergovernmental bodies to involve themselves in administrative and budgetary matters;
>
> 4. *Invites* the Secretary-General to provide all intergovernmental bodies with the required information regarding procedures for administrative and budgetary matters."

6. As regards the establishment of a compact secretariat, it should be noted that paragraph 2 of rule 31 of the rules of procedure of the Economic and Social Council, provides that the Secretary-General shall have an opportunity to determine the most effective and economical means of implementing programme budget proposals recommended by a committee or commission of the Council and make appropriate recommendations to the Council.

7. There is currently a secretariat for the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests consisting of five posts funded from extrabudgetary resources (two professional officers, one junior professional officer, and two General Services staff), and one professional post on loan from another part of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

8. From September 1995 to June 2000, the secretariat of the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests included six professional posts, one junior professional officer and two General Service posts funded from various sources: the coordinator of the secretariat and two General Service (Other level) (funded from the Trust Fund to Support the Work of the Commission on Sustainable Development); two D-1s (one seconded from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the other from the United Nations Environment Programme); one P-5 (seconded from the International Tropical Timber Organization); two P-4

(one seconded from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the other from the United Nations Development Programme); and one junior professional officer (JPO) (funded by the Government of Finland). Currently, that secretariat consists of three professional posts (the coordinator of the Secretariat, the D-1 seconded from UNEP, and the P-4 seconded from the Department of Economic and Social Affairs), the JPO funded by Finland and the two General Service posts.

9. Given the complex nature and wide scope of the functions that the secretariat would have to perform in order to provide the United Nations Forum on Forests adequate services, and on the basis of an initial assessment of what the multi-year programme of work of the Forum may include, it is considered that the current staff resources of the secretariat would eventually need to be strengthened. A preliminary assessment of the necessary staffing resources shows that the compact secretariat to be funded by the United Nations might comprise as a minimum four staff members at the Professional level and two staff members at the General Service level. The full cost of these posts is estimated at $682,900 per year at current rates. It is assumed that this compact secretariat would continue to be strengthened through secondments from international and regional organizations and voluntary contributions. It should be noted that the optimum staffing requirements of the Forum secretariat can only be determined in the light of the scope and complexity of the multi-year programme of work to be adopted by the Forum, at its substantive session in 2001.

10. Consultations with the organizations in the partnership and interested donors on the funding of the United Nations Forum on Forests and its compact secretariat have not yet led to concrete results. It is expected that the meeting of the inter-agency task force on forests, to be held on 18 October 2000 in Rome, will provide an opportunity to assess the resources that the organizations in the partnership might be able to contribute over and above United Nations resources.

11. It is not anticipated that the compact secretariat envisaged in the draft resolution could be established at this stage from within the existing resources approved by the General Assembly for the biennium 2000-2001 under section 9 of the programme budget.

12. The extrabudgetary resources contributed for activities related to forests are sufficient to enable the current staff of the secretariat on forests to carry out the activities related to the preparation and holding of the organizational and first substantive session of United Nations Forum on Forests in 2001. These activities would include: (a) submission of proposals for the multi-year programme of work of the proposed United Nations Forum on Forests; (b) initiating the establishment and servicing of the collaborative partnership on forests; (c) assessing government-led initiatives organized in support of the multi-year programme of wo[illegible]; and (d) providing information on request, undertaking consultations, as relevant, with governments, intergovernmental and regional organizations and other interested parties.

13. The Secretary-General will keep the situation of the resources available to the United Nations Forum on Forests secretariat under close scrutiny. Should these resources be insufficient to enable the secretariat to carry out the above activities efficiently, he would review all the means available to ensure that the necessary resources are at the disposal of the Forum secretariat, including the submission of revised estimates and a request for the use of the contingency fund. In the course of the first substantive session of the Forum, he will be in a better position to assess the actual requirements of the Forum secretariat in terms of staff and non-staff resources. By that time, it is expected that the organizations in the partnership and other donors will have indicated the nature and size of their contributions, and that the United Nations Forum on Forests will have adopted the multi-year programme of work, developed a plan of action for the implementation of Intergovernmental Panel on Forests/Intergovernmental Forum on Forests proposals for action, and initiated the United Nations Forum on Forests work with the collaborative partnership on forests.

II. Section 2, General Assembly affairs and conference services

14. The requirements at full cost for conference servicing are estimated to amount to $631,110. These requirements include the servicing of the first session of the United Nations Forum on Forests in New York, from 25 June to 6 July 2001 with 4 meetings per day for 10 days, and the servicing during the week of 12 February 2001 of the organizational meeting of UNFF for one day, in conjunction with four days of informal consultations. There would be two meetings per day, with services for the informal consultations being

provided on an "as available" basis. The details of the requirements are as follows:

	Organizational meeting New York	*Substantive session New York*
	(United States dollars)	
Meeting servicing and interpretation	69 380	276 551
Pre-session documentation	18 746	183 993
In-session documentation	2 435	17 849
Post-session documentation	5 014	57 142
Total conference-servicing (at full cost)	**95 575**	**535 535**

15. The above estimates for conference-servicing costs are based on the theoretical assumption that no part of the conference-servicing requirements would be met from within the permanent conference-servicing capacity included under section 2 (General Assembly affairs and conference services) of the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.[3] The extent to which the Organization's permanent conference-servicing capacity would need to be supplemented by temporary assistance resources could be determined only in the light of the calendar of conferences and meetings for 2000-2001. Provision has been included, under section 2 of the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001, not only for meetings programmed at the time of preparation of the budget, but also for meetings which might be authorized subsequently, provided that the number and distribution of meetings and conferences are consistent with the pattern of meetings of past years. As a result, no additional resources would be required under section 2 of the programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.

D. Conclusion

16. As indicated above, the Secretary-General intends to keep the resource situation of the United Nations Forum on Forests secretariat under constant scrutiny. Should resources be insufficient between now and the first substantive session of the Forum, the Secretary-General would submit revised estimates with a request for additional resources from the regular budget through a charge against the contingency fund. In the course of the first substantive session of the Forum, the Secretary-General would be in a better position to assess the actual requirements of the compact secretariat, and he intends to submit his proposals for permanent funding arrangements at that time through a statement of programme budget implications reflecting the decisions that the Forum would take at that time regarding its long-term work programme.

Notes

[1] At present, the Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests is composed of the secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Centre for International Forestry Research, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Tropical Timber Organization, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Environmental Programme and the World Bank and is chaired by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

[2] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/53/6/Rev.1).

[3] Ibid., *Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/54/6/Rev.1).